

Article Appearing in Roanoke Times, April 8, 2008

Neighborhood Profile: Norwich



ERIC BRADY The Roanoke Times

The Norwich community in Roanoke contains many former company homes from its industrial past.

The small community of Norwich was supposed to prosper as industry along the Roanoke River expanded.

Instead, neighborhoods such as Wasena, Raleigh Court and Virginia Heights grew up on the perimeters, and Norwich was left pretty much untouched.

Children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren now live in many of the houses once inhabited by their ancestors.

Norwich Neighborhood Alliance president Ronnie Stanley believes the last new house in the area was built in the 1970s.

The row houses, also known as shotgun houses, "because you could stand at the front door and shoot a gun straight through the back," were built for laborers who worked in mills and other companies that almost form a circle around the community, said Jerry Farris, the alliance's vice president.

Stanley and Farris said they think the city of Roanoke has forgotten Norwich, but they wouldn't want to live elsewhere.

They are trying to get beautification projects under way and purchase equipment for the Norwich Park, the community's gathering spot.

Nine families were known to have lived in what is now Norwich in the mid-1700s, long before William Persinger purchased the property in the early 1800s, according to Doris Neal, who's researching the neighborhood.

"I'm proud to have been born and raised in Norwich. Norwich was always a comfortable and safe haven where you could come and go as a kid," she said.

-- JoAnne Poindexter